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## Christian Discipleship through Racial Justice and Reconciliation: A Lenten Reading of *The Hate U Give*

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CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH RACIAL JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION:

A LENTEN READING OF *THE HATE U GIVE*

“Christian Discipleship Through Racial Justice and Reconciliation”

ABIGAIL SHAM

SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

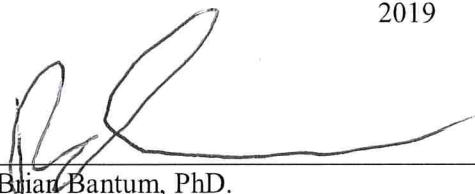
CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH RACIAL JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION: A  
LENTEN READING OF *THE HATE U GIVE*

ABIGAIL SHAM

A PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS  
OF MASTER OF DIVINITY AT SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

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## Table of Contents

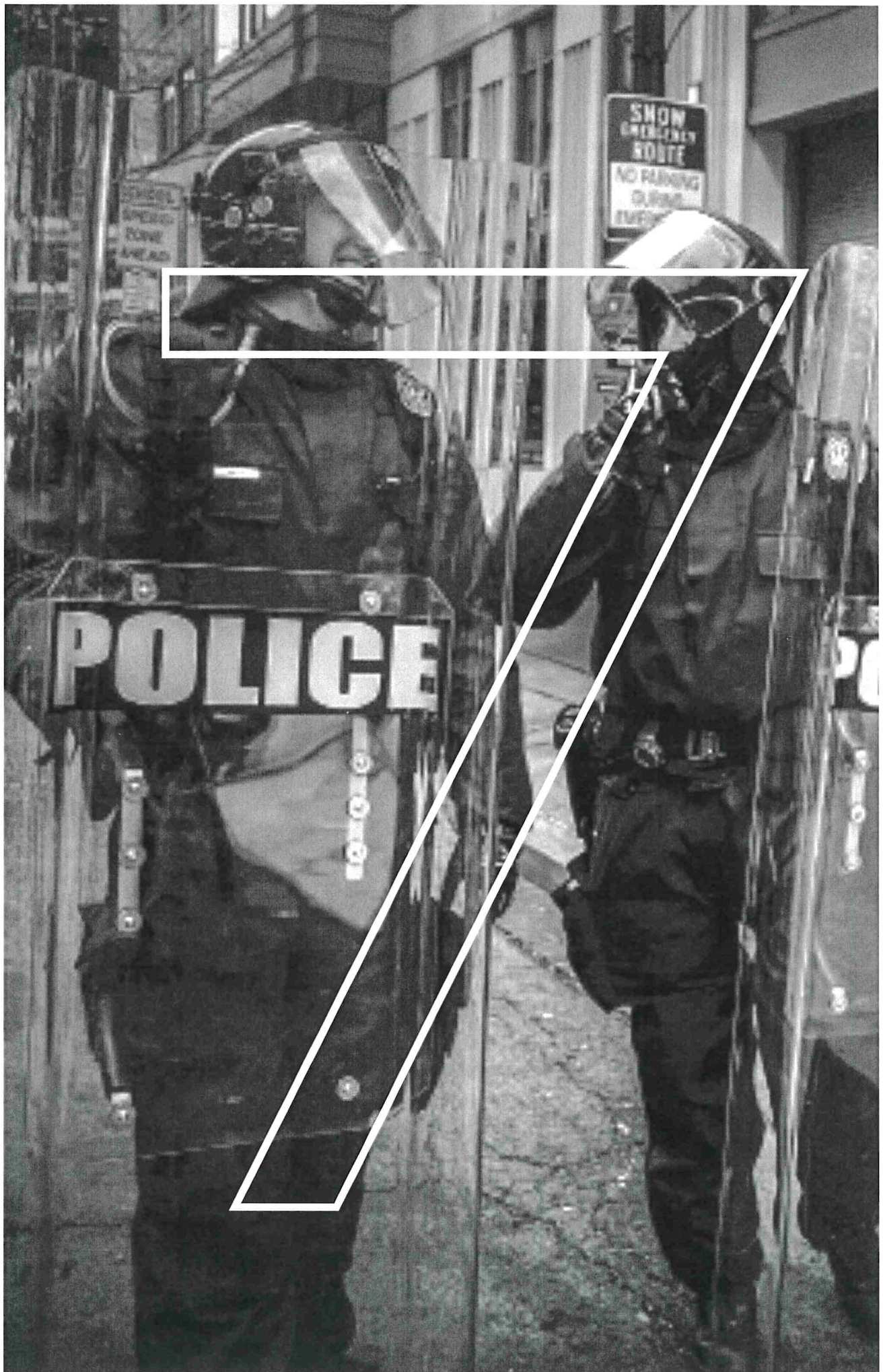
Introduction.....	1
Example Lenten Devotional Content.....	3
Concluding Reflections.....	11
Works Cited.....	13

## Introduction

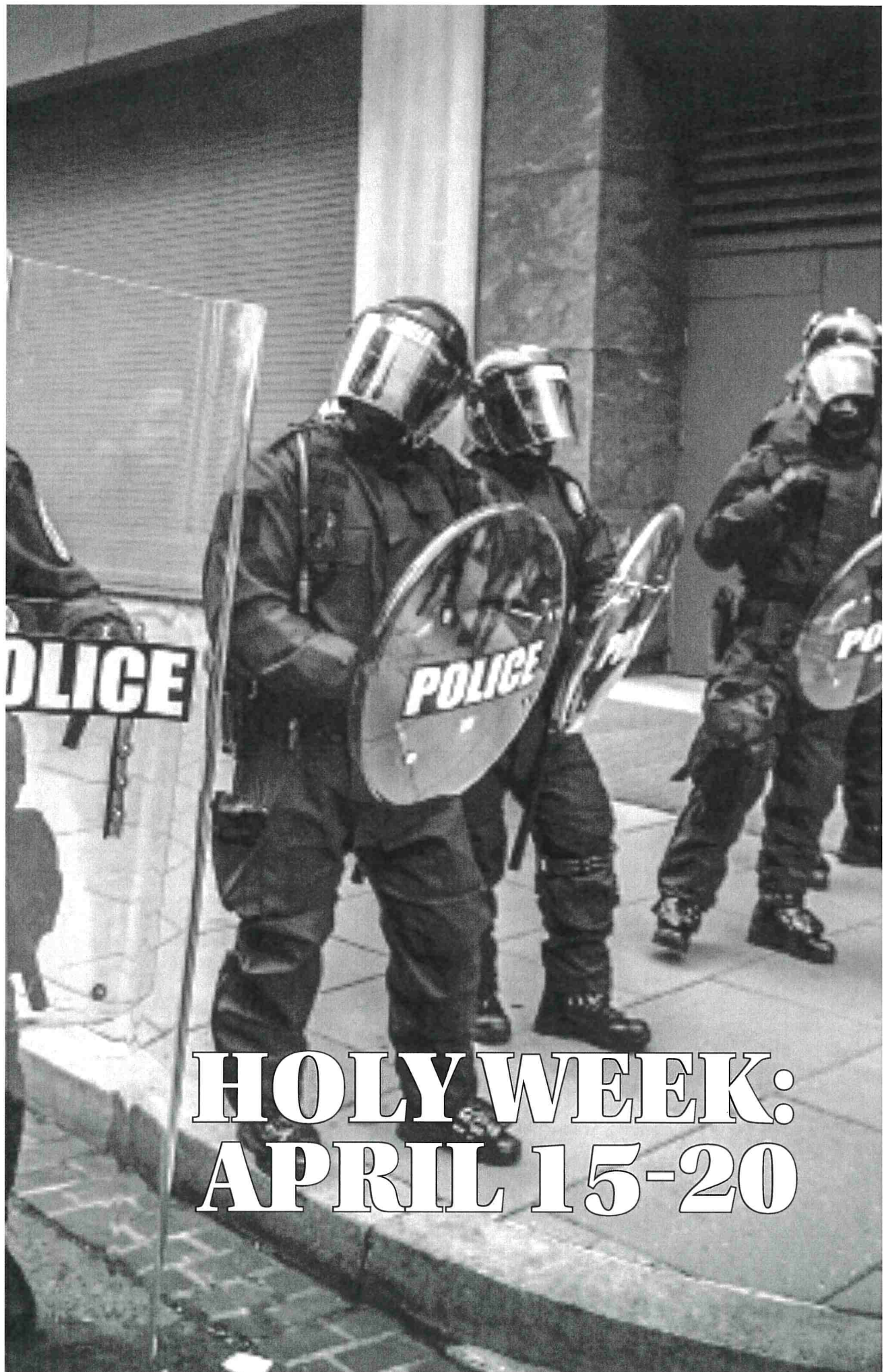
Humans are relational by nature, functioning in a constant state of dependence on others for daily subsistence and identity formation. Within this relational existence, sin arises when the powerful draw lines of belonging and exclusion according to a set of particularities. More pointedly, the sin of racism breaks the mutual flow of true relationship by naming and demeaning others according to myths of racial difference. However, when the sin of racism is typically acknowledged by predominantly white churches, the initial tendency is to approach the problem through non-relational educational means. These congregations seek to resist white supremacy by amassing knowledge on the topic of racism while ignoring the experiential and transformative process that requires a congregation to wrestle with white supremacy's formation of personal identities, social systems, and ways of worshiping God. This project was designed in such a church, where books on racism were read and guest lecturers were brought in to educate the congregation on the evil of racism, but racial justice and reconciliation was not integrated into the worshiping life of the church. As such, this project acts as step two in a discipleship process that values racial justice and reconciliation.

The first step involved the reading of Daniel Hill's *White Awake: An Honest Look at What It Means to Be White*, which offered the congregation a common language and knowledge base concerning whiteness and the narrative of racial difference. To produce an imaginative and dialogical experience, this curriculum asked groups to read the young adult novel *The Hate U Give* alongside of Lenten Scripture depicting Christ's journey to the cross. These two stories—the story of a young black woman and the story of Jesus Christ—became the altar that exposed and transformed how our community might grapple with privilege, racism, and bias. By coming together in community, we were invited to encounter God's revelation in Scripture, in *The Hate*

*U Give*, and in our life experiences. In the process of weaving together multiple levels of stories and experiences, self-reflection and group discussions became the experiential means of coming to know racism and white supremacy in relation to community and context. As a result, this curriculum created a relational way of knowing important content for Christian discipleship and empowered those involved in the process to become better readers of self, the gospel, and the world.







**HOLY WEEK:  
APRIL 15-20**



## Monday: Read Chapters 22-26 in *The Hate U Give*

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### Tuesday: Genesis 22.1-18

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What do you hear the Spirit speaking to you in this passage?

While the nature of Abraham's obedience in this text is troubling, we might consider how we are being called, like Abraham, to lay our lives and identities on God's refining and liberating altar so we might truly experience freedom in Christ. What lies does white supremacy say about white people and people of color that need to experience death so you might live more freely and faithfully?

After the non-indictment of Officer Cruise, Garden Heights erupts in protest and an entire community becomes a war zone. Protests and riots force those blinded by whiteness to see the evil that is hidden and covered over by societal norms. Most Christians interpret Isaac on the altar as a foreshadowing of Christ on the cross. What are some similarities between Starr's protest and Christ's opposition to dehumanizing and enslaving powers? How have you responded to protests in our country concerning racism and white supremacy?

## Wednesday: Psalm 19

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What do you hear the Spirit speaking to you in this passage?

This psalm says that the Lord's instruction revives one's being, it makes naïve people wise, it gladdens the heart, and it sheds light on one's eyes. And yet, Scripture also describes God's word as a double-edged sword that pierces our souls and judges our thoughts (Heb. 4.12). How has God's instruction to you this Lenten season felt like revival and how has it felt like a piercing sword?

The last few chapters of *The Hate U Give* highlight a variety of **microaggressions** that work to diminish Starr and any person or culture that deviates from white culture (for examples, see pages 376 and 401). The incarnation redefines humanity, as God is joined to flesh and the Spirit of God comes to dwell within humanity. Christians have but should not succumb to white supremacy. How is God calling you to see and repent of formerly unknown wrongs (such as microaggressions), and how is God's word to you sweeter than honey and restoring your soul (v. 10)?

## Thursday: Romans 6.3-11

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What do you hear the Spirit speaking to you in this passage?

Those who are baptized into Christ are baptized into his death and are new creatures who live in distinctly Christ-like ways. How are you experiencing Christ's death and resurrection in your daily life?

When King sets Maverick's store on fire, the entire community gathers together to do the seemingly impossible—they speak out against King's violence and oppression so they might become a more liberated community. How are you experiencing the Body of Christ collectively dying to comfortability, pride, greed, and privilege in order to create a better world? How can you urge your community towards this kind of life?

## Friday: Luke 23.1-56

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What do you hear the Spirit speaking to you in this passage?

As you read the narrative of Christ's suffering and crucifixion today, who in the story do you identify with? Are you like Pilate, who submits to corrupt systems of power? Are you like the women who grieve over Christ and remain with him in his suffering? Are you like the accusing and crucified criminal? Or are you like Christ, suffering for the sake of liberation? How do you experience the narrative differently as you take up different perspectives?

Contemplate verses 23-25. How does the crowd's desire for Barabbas' release and Christ's crucifixion inform your reading of *The Hate U Give*? Who does our society acquit and who does our society crucify? Has reading Christ's crucifixion alongside *The Hate U Give* fostered a new imagination of Christ present in our world? Where do you see Jesus in your community?

## Holy Saturday

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On Holy Saturday, Christ lays dead in the tomb. On Easter, Christ will transform this tomb of death into a womb of resurrection life. Take time to contemplate artist Mark Dukes' icon, "Our Lady Mother of Ferguson and All Those Killed by Gun Violence." Rather than new life taking up space in her womb, a child is caught in the crosshairs of a gun—with hands up and no chance of escaping a deadly bullet. The child's head is encircled with a halo, signifying sacredness. Christ is incarnate to us in America in this child—in all children, women, and men who are dehumanized and held at gunpoint for not being made in the image of whiteness.

Throughout Lent, we saw Starr embody Christ's liberating presence, but that embodiment required the death of "Williamson Starr" so that she might speak and live truthfully. In her liberation, Starr became liberated *for* others—for Khalil, for her family, for her friends, and for her community. She became like Mary, carrying Christ's liberating presence within her body and proclaiming liberation for the poor and the oppressed. Her life birthed newness of life for others.

On this day of silence and death, consider who is your mother—the Mother of God or the mother of whiteness? Have you experienced death and newness of life in Christ's tomb turned womb? Who is your Mother? Who is your Father? Who are your brothers and sisters? How does your body make space for liberation or perpetuate oppression?

"Our Lady Mother of Ferguson and  
All Those Killed by  
Gun Violence," 2015  
Acrylic Collage Painting  
© MARK DUKES  
Used With Permission of the Artist

## Concluding Reflections

All curriculum is written from a unique perspective. As a white woman, developing a curriculum purposed to expose and interrogate whiteness was a difficult task. The task was complicated in that the church for which the devotional was created is predominately white but is not completely white. Further, not all white people or people of color at our church are formed by or oppressed by whiteness in a uniform manner. When I wrote each reflection question, I wanted to offer something to the community that would initiate thoughtful reflection. However, I also realized that each question I wrote would inevitably fail to account for someone's body or someone's experience. Therefore, this writing project was first and foremost formative for me, the author. The writing process forced me to wrestle with the complexity of personhood and to deeply feel my embodied limitations. Further, the writing process created an opportunity to live in dependence—to create with others and not in isolation. I needed the wisdom and voices of those whose bodies tell different stories than mine and whose eyes are more attuned to life's racial narratives to read, critique, and edit the curriculum.

This creation-in-community continued as the curriculum was offered to a Lenten discussion group for the sake of personal and communal reflection. Through these discussions, I found that the devotional was not *the* means of discipleship but instead acted as a tool for critical reflection and storytelling. In fact, some of the most transformative discussions occurred as the group critiqued the limitations of the devotional. It was at this point that my understanding of pedagogy changed. Rather than seeing curriculum as a static means of transferring important information to a congregation, I discovered that truly transformative curriculum is dynamic and cultivates synergistic learning, where wisdom arises as the group listens to the Spirit speak through their lives and the lives of others. Therefore, this curriculum does not teach on its own

but teaches through the interactions that it facilitates. My hope is that this curriculum will be rewritten over and over as it becomes the work of a community rather than the work of a single author.

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